



United Way
of Broome County

December 10, 2018

Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary
Office of the Secretary
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street SW
Washington, DC 20554

Re: WC Docket No. 18-336 and CC Docket No. 92-105 regarding the National Suicide Hotline Improvement Act of 2018.

Dear Madam,

United Way of Broome County appreciates the opportunity to comment on the current effort undertaken by the Federal Communications Commission to study the feasibility of designating a three-digit number to the National Suicide Hotline and to assess the effectiveness of the current National Suicide Prevention Lifeline. In Broome County NY, United Way of Broome County is fighting for the health, education and financial stability of every individual by investing in 211, the Healthy Lifestyles Coalition, Basic Needs, and Strategic Priorities, which include youth, families and seniors. 211 Susquehanna River Region is currently in collaboration with the local Coordinated Entry System through the Homeless Coalition and the OASAS (NYS Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Services) project.

We acknowledge efforts are needed to create a safe place for all people to call – especially underserved or marginalized populations such as seniors, people with physical or intellectual disabilities, people that identify as LGBTQ+, Veterans, American Natives, non-English speakers, and individuals facing complex problems such as substance/opioid use, human trafficking, and domestic violence. Our United Way of Broome County has a 100 year history, and 211 Susquehanna River Region has 35 years, seven of which have been as a 211, reaching out to the underserved and today we partner with over two hundred business, nonprofit agencies and government stakeholders to drive systemic changes to solve our community's toughest problems like mental health and crisis.

We encourage the FCC to consider our 211 work here in Broome County as a vital partner in increasing access to suicide prevention and intervention services. Since the FCC designation of 211 in 2000, we have invested approximately \$170,000 per year since 2011 to the success of 211 and answer 40,000 requests for help each year. Moreover, each year United Way of Broome County invests more than \$3,000,000 in mental health, substance use, health, education, and other financial stability services. These critical investments position us to be key partners in the success of an improved mental health and crisis response system.



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Another three-digit code may erode the simplicity of a single point of access for community help. Despite concerted efforts by numerous social services, and multiple hotlines, in our community to educate and market the distinctions, a person in crisis will likely always reach for the most familiar or most accessible number. United Way of Broome County 211 receives calls that are better suited for 911, and our 911 partners often receive calls that we can best answer.

We recommend that resources should be invested to improve a unified single point of access with a blended partnership of the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline and United Way's 211 services. We believe in the power of partnership to address gaps, not duplicate services, and will be a valuable partner in the fight against suicide.

You can learn more about our work at www.uwbroome.org ; helpme211.org, and can reach my office for additional questions or discussion at 607-240-2000. Thank you for your time in addressing this important issue and for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Jacqueline Gerchman
Executive Director
United Way of Broome County